



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 167

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2021

No. 200

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ELIZABETH WARREN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, You are the fountain of every blessing. Thank You for this good land with her hills and valleys, her fertile soil, her trees, plains, and mountains. Lord, we are grateful for the brilliant colors of the changing seasons. Inspire us to strive to become a great nation full of truth and righteousness.

Lord, give our leaders the wisdom to honor Your Name by living with integrity and humility. Teach them to express in words and deeds a spirit of justice for the glory of Your Name.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 17, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable ELIZABETH WARREN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. WARREN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Brian Eddie Nelson, of California, to be Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Crimes.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, later today, the Senate is scheduled to take the first procedural step to begin consideration of the annual defense bill.

Our Republican colleagues have said for weeks that we need to move quickly to take up the NDAA and pass it through the Chamber.

This morning, we are continuing to work with our Republican colleagues to strengthen the substitute with as many amendments from Senators as possible. We are making really good progress, and so we will give the Armed Services Committee more time this

morning to review the text and come to a final agreement.

But the Senate needs to move forward on this bill, and quickly. With so much bipartisan interest in getting NDAA done soon, I see no reason why we can't finish this legislation or come to an agreement to finish this bill quickly.

I thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, and especially our committee chairs. I thank them because they are propelling this important legislation forward.

BUILD BACK BETTER AGENDA

Now on Build Back Better—I want to return to a comment made recently by the other side that crystalizes the difference between how the two parties see today's challenges.

“A gold mine.” “A gold mine.” Those three words were used by my colleague, the junior Senator from Florida, when talking about Americans struggling with rising costs. A gold mine for them.

If you want to know why Americans can get frustrated with Washington, look no further than the comments like the one from the gentleman from Florida.

The Republicans, who voted for a giant tax break for millionaires and billionaires, don't have any solutions for working families, but they see political gold in exploiting their struggles.

Families are still struggling to pull themselves out of a once-in-a-century economic crisis brought about by COVID. They want to pay less for things like groceries, healthcare, prescription drugs, and childcare. They want us to find ways to make that happen, and that is just what Democrats are doing in Build Back Better. But, unfortunately, Republicans appear more interested in politics than progress.

It is simple: If we want to fight inflation, if we want to create more jobs—so many businesses are short of workers—and if we want to lower costs and

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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make sure families have more money in their pockets, the best thing—the best thing—we can do is pass Build Back Better.

Seventeen Nobel Prize-winning economists—and more from both sides of the political spectrum—have said that this bill will help relieve inflationary pressures over the long term.

And this morning, an exclusive by Reuters confirmed that, for all the Republicans howling at the Moon about inflation, Build Back Better will not—will not—increase inflation.

And here is what the leading economist at Moody's said:

The bills do not add to inflation pressures, as the policies help to lift long-term economic growth via stronger productivity and labor force growth, and thus take the edge off inflation.

Stronger growth, less inflation. I will say it again: If you want to fight inflation, if you want to lower costs and grow the economy, support Build Back Better. If you want to fight inflation, support Build Back Better.

Build Back Better is going to help families save money by making childcare more affordable. It is going to give parents a tax break so they can pay for diapers and groceries and gas. It is going to lower the cost of prescription drugs, like insulin and cancer treatments; and it is going to put more Americans to work, help our economy grow in the long term.

The American people want these things.

Why won't a single Republican come out and vote for them—a single Republican? Why do Republicans seem so intent on opposing lowering the price of insulin or giving parents a middle-class tax break?

Given the choice between helping families afford childcare and leaving them to fend for themselves, Republicans are telling families: You are on your own.

Listen to the list of things I just mentioned: middle-class tax breaks, lowering prescription drug costs, childcare. These aren't handouts. These aren't luxury items. To so many families, they are daily essentials, and they are just the beginning of what the BBB would offer.

While Democrats are fighting to pass legislation to lower costs, Republicans, who spent years under Donald Trump trying to repeal healthcare and give tax breaks to the ultrarich, are opposing tax cuts to the middle class while rooting for prices to go up and up—a gold mine.

Americans won't forget who in Washington is fighting for them and who is spending their time trying to exploit their hardships.

KIGALI AMENDMENT

Finally, the Kigali Amendment. Yesterday, the Senate received a message from the White House calling for us to approve a treaty amendment that will curb our country's use of dangerous hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs.

Commonly known as the Kigali Amendment, 120 countries have agreed

to the amendment. Even China is on the list. We should join it too.

HFCs are dangerous greenhouse chemicals found in everyday appliances from air-conditioners to refrigerators. They are thousands of times more damaging to our atmosphere than carbon dioxide. We had made progress in eliminating these chemicals before the Trump administration characteristically, unfortunately, took us backwards.

Phasing out these HFCs is very important and will go a long way in fighting climate change and protecting the environment for future generations. And it is supported by the business community too, as it will open up companies to markets for HFC alternatives overseas, promoting investment, innovation, and greater economic activity.

Approving this amendment will require two-thirds of the Senate. Reducing our country's use of HFCs has been a bipartisan priority in the past. In fact, last December, the Senate approved the first-ever agreement to phase down HFCs—a significant win for fighting the climate crisis. It should be a bipartisan priority right now.

In the wake of the President's visit to Glasgow, approving this amendment—which much of the world already embraces—is essential for telling the world we are committed to fighting the climate crisis. If we want to lead the world on this issue, it must—it must—get done.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 4350

Now, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on the motion to proceed to H.R. 4350 occur at a time to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, a lot has gone wrong since this unified Democratic government took the reins back in January.

Let's take a look at foreign policy. The Biden administration's clumsy retreat from Afghanistan left Americans behind, who wanted out, and handed the country to a government staffed with terrorists that used to be locked up at Guantanamo Bay.

Let's take a look at energy independence. Or should I say energy dependence? President Biden canceled our

own Keystone XL Pipeline but cleared the path for a new pipeline for Vladimir Putin. The amount of Russian oil that America has to import has already nearly doubled on the Democrats' watch.

Look at the border. Illegal crossers are flooding across our southern border at an all-time high. The Democrats have interior enforcement arrests down to a decade low.

But there is no question what crisis is at the top of the minds of middle-class Americans. There is no question what is keeping working Americans awake at night. It is inflation. Inflation. The runaway prices and unpredictability that Democrats' policies have fueled.

Ninety percent of Americans told one recent survey that they are somewhat or extremely concerned with inflation. We are a huge and diverse country. It is hard to get 9 in 10 Americans to agree on almost anything, but less than 1 year under Democrat policies, 90 percent of America is worried about inflation.

And it is no wonder. Year on year, consumer prices have risen faster than they have in over three decades. Last month marked the fifth month in a row that inflation has topped 5 percent.

These across-the-board numbers can sound a little abstract, so let's make it very tangible. In the past year, buying meat, fish, and eggs has gotten 12 percent more expensive. A gallon of gas costs the average American \$1.31 than it did a year ago. And heaven forbid anyone having to replace a family car this year; used auto prices are up 26 percent.

Even getting family and friends together for Thanksgiving is a much pricier prospect than it was last year. Turkey alone is an extra 25 cents per pound. Factor in all the fixings, and some estimates project a feast next week will run families up to 15 percent more than it did last year.

For a while, the White House tried to downplay the problem. President Biden and his team told American families that costs weren't really rising as much as it seemed; or that, OK, costs were rising, but it would only last a few months; or, as some liberals argued, that if you remove food costs, housing costs, and transportation costs from the equation, inflation really wasn't all that bad.

Some have tried to argue that rampant inflation is actually a high-class problem to have because at least we aren't in a recession. I am not kidding. I guess they think working Americans should stop complaining and be grateful things aren't even worse.

But a sad irony is that inflation is exactly the opposite of a high-class problem. Inflation is like a huge, regressive tax hike that hits the middle class, the working class, and the poor far more than it hurts wealthy people.

The three biggest drivers of the staggering 6.2 percent inflation rate we